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Professions, Bonds and Boundaries. Visioning a globalising, managed and inclusive professionalism

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Professions are bound to societal developments as policy experts, organisational managers, and providers of a wide range of services from teachers, doctors and carers to social workers and others. While they are serving as 'connecting tie' between the state and its citizens and between organisations, professionalism has also all too often been a host for 'social exclusion' and 'boundary work'. Currently, societies are facing many changes that may impact in the professions and re-design the bonds, calling for a more inclusive professionalism. The global economy is increasingly becoming a single market, especially for high-skilled workers like professionals; social media may furthermore accelerate the creation of new bonds across the globe. At the same time, new emergent global labour markets, new connections between management and professionalism and the overall changing social composition of the professions, including gender and ethnic dimensions, may all foster re-stratification processes and the 'making' and 'unmaking' of boundaries. The Interim Conference of the International Sociological Association Research Committee 52 "Sociology of Professional Groups", hosted by the Catholic University in Milan between the 19th and 21st of March, addressed these issues under the title "Professions, Bonds and Boundaries. Visioning a globalising, managed and inclusive professionalism" and ~~seeked-sought~~ to ~~further-improve~~ the debates into visionary models of professionalism.

The Interim Conference was a very successful and stimulating event with a truly international audience: 170 participants and 18 sessions for a total of 28 parallel panels, with more than 30 countries represented. We selected four papers, which will be published in pairs in this issue and the next.

The Latin American turn of social professionals

In the last years, the welfare system has been subjected to several transformations that have consolidated worldwide after decades of public expenses' retrenchments. Especially in Latin America, two decades of neoliberal reforms have resulted in strongly dualistic societies characterised by an increasing labour precariousness. Thus, social inequalities are now at their highest since the redistributive effect of welfare were limited by the conditionality and the insurance approach of public policies.

The necessity of offering a basic system of welfare in a context of budget restraints has meant the promotion of innovative solutions in the last years in order to encompass the increasing inequalities, fostering new relationships between the traditional actors of welfare. The most important phenomenon to be highlighted is the progressive rescaling of public policies, which have been sustained in the last years in several countries of Latin America. This turn is functional to neoliberal strategies of central government expenses' reduction, to the involvement of private actors in the welfare systems, but also effective to promote tailored solutions for each specific locality – given ~~their~~ peculiarity ~~necessity-needs~~ in terms of social inequalities and/or urban poverty.

These new trends have implied interesting consequences on the social workers professionalism, thanks to ~~the~~ new regulations and new professionals figures that have been emerging. However, if the impact of reform processes of welfare in Latin America has been widely studied, their consequences in terms of working conditions for the professionals involved has been somehow neglected.

In this special issue, we present two papers that describe the consequences of the recent transformation of public policies in Argentina and Brazil. The first paper from Susana Penalva reflects on the institutional impact of new frames of references of national public reforms in Argentina. It aims at analysing the emerging dynamics of multilevel governance and its consequent influence on social professions. In the second paper from Isabel Georges, the consequences of subcontracting in public policies are analysed, through three case studies from Brazil. The rising demands of *care* and the increasing dualisation of the labour market has created new boundaries between formal and informal work in Brazilian labour market, in which the progressive devolution of competencies from state to subcontractors in social services has intervened.

In sum, the two papers allow the reader to reflect on the current transformation of ~~social~~ professionalism in Latin America, especially regarding ~~their-its~~ progressive hybridisation in a context of competencies' devolution. If for the case of Brazil the notion of self-entrepreneurs is progressively entering the domain as workers become subcontractors, in Argentina it is the territorialised forms of intervention that have been the main answer to the rising needs of an impoverished population.